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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Cooking Vegetables to Conserve Food Value

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

An interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, and Miss Rosemary Loughlin, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate stations, Tuesday, February 21, 1933.

MISS VAN DEMAN: How do you do; Everybody:

Well, we're around to another food topic on the Household Calendar today. Food is so definitely linked with our state of nutrition, and our nutrition is so definitely linked with our health that we can't afford to overlook any part of the chain.

Today we're concentrating on vegetables, especially the cooking of vegetables. The Bureau of Home Economics runs various cooking tests on vegetables. Some are cooperative with the Bureau of Plant Industry. When the crop specialists develop a new variety or bring in a new kind of vegetable from some other country, we try out its cooking qualities. We also take the common garden kinds and cook them in ways that conserve food values and give what's sometimes called "appetite appeal."

In these Household Calendar talks I've been going on the theory that you like best to hear about experiments from the experimenters themselves. So, I asked Miss Rosemary Loughlin to come over today and to give us some of the background of her work on vegetable cookery.

Miss Loughlin, what do you consider are the main principles of vegetable cookery?

MISS LOUGHLIN: You've already stated them in a way, Miss Van Deman, when you said "to conserve food values and to give 'appetite appeal'". The recent discoveries in nutrition, and by recent I mean the findings of the last twenty or so years, have given us a new idea of value of vegetables in the diet.

We now know that green, and yellow, and orange in vegetables are more than just pretty colors. They usually indicate the presence of certain vitamins. We've also learned that heat tends to destroy some of those vitamins, and that when vegetables are cut up and cooked in water some of the minerals are bound to dissolve in the water. Chemical changes also take place in vegetables as they cook, changes that affect flavor, color, and texture. Some of these changes make vegetables more appetizing, some do not.

MISS VAN DEMAN: So I take it, Miss Loughlin, that the science of vegetable cookery is something like this. It combines these facts about the nutritive value of vegetables themselves and about the chemistry of cooking so skillfully that when vegetables come on the table they look good, and they taste good, and nobody has to urge us to eat more.

(over)



MISS LOUGHLIN: Yes, that's about it. Now to come down to cooking methods. I put baking first, as a means of conserving food value. Take potatoes, for example, baked in their own jackets. They lose no minerals and very little of their vitamin content, and the moisture in the potatoes themselves changes to steam and cooks them soft and mealy. Food specialists, you notice, put baked potatoes on children's menus very often.

Our modern baking dishes of earthenware and tempered glass make it possible to bake vegetables that we never used to consider cooking in this way. Baked tomatoes, baked onions, baked beets, baked stuffed cucumbers, a casserole of mixed vegetables are all delicious, I think. And by the way, use a moderate oven in baking vegetables so that the heat penetrates evenly.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, for the vegetables that can't be baked what do you recommend, Miss Loughlin?

MISS LOUGHLIN: Steaming for some, or boiling, or panning.

Steaming also conserves food value, but it spoils the attractive green color of some kinds. For carrots, squash, sweetpotatoes, parsnips, and wax beans, I considered steaming very satisfactory.

Of course, more vegetables are boiled than are cooked in any other way.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And more are boiled to death, wouldn't you say too, Miss Loughlin?

MISS LOUGHLIN: Yes, indeed. As a nation there's no telling how much food value we boil out of our vegetables and waste each year. And we lose in another way too--over-cooked vegetables are generally mushy or flabby and we aren't stimulated to eat as many as we need.

The modern rules for boiling vegetables are -- use a small quantity of water, have it boiling when you put the vegetable in, and cook just long enough to make the vegetable tender. And by tender, I don't mean soft. Green vegetables lose their greenness very easily. So for spinach, and brussels sprouts, and green cabbage, and green snap beans and peas, leave the lid off of the kettle. This allows volatile acids to escape and preserves the green color.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I've heard, Miss Loughlin, that a pinch of soda in the cooking water will keep green vegetables green. Also I've heard they stay green better in a large quantity of water.

MISS LOUGHLIN: Yes, both of those things are true. But they sacrifice food value. In our experiments we work for methods that conserve vitamins, and minerals, and other food values, and also enough of the attractive color to please the eye. When it comes to a choice, we'd rather sacrifice a little green color than quite a lot of food value.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I have no end of other questions I'd like to ask you Miss Loughlin. Six minutes goes fast on a subject like vegetable cookery. Thank you and come again, please.

By the way, Miss Loughlin has a bulletin on cooking vegetables in press now. If you're interested, write to me and I'll send you notice when it is ready to distribute.

Next week our subject will be "Science applied to meat cookery," and Lucy Alexander will be our guest.

Good-bye for this time.